

# Show Business

## Stranger in a Strange Land

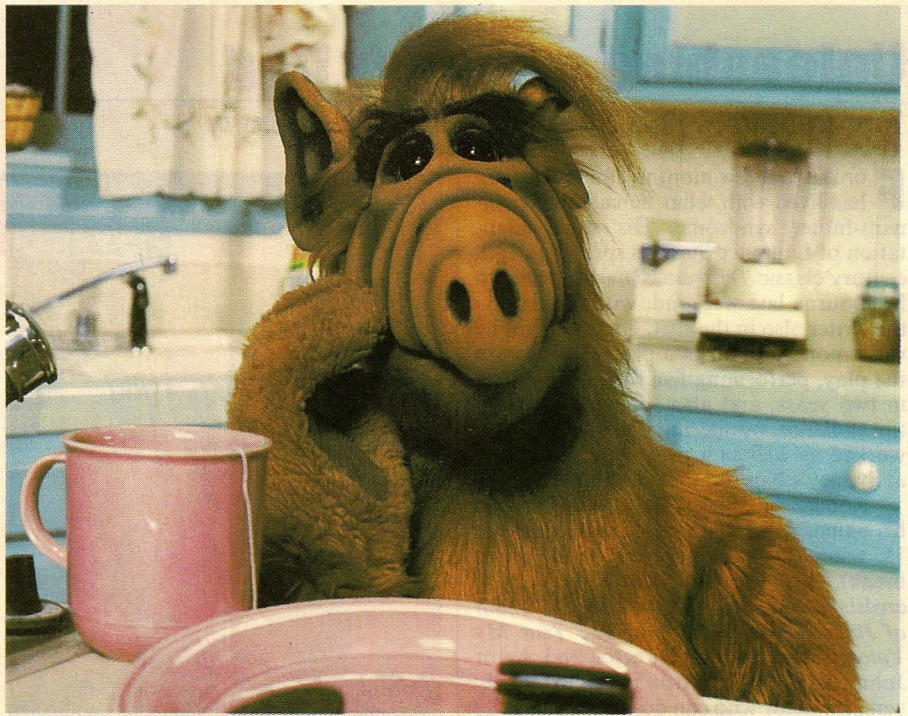
*Puppet or alien, NBC's ALF is an intergalactic star*

Yo, Skip! Yo, Rhonda!

I don't know if this radiocast will reach you guys way out there in your spaceship, but I really miss you. You're still the only other beings from Melmac who I know survived when the planet blew up. A lot of amazing things have happened to your old buddy Gordo since you last heard my signal, soon after I crash-landed through the Tanner family's garage roof and decided to stay here in sunny California. There are drawbacks: this place earth is so outsville you can't buy a whisker omelet or a tabby-paw pie. Here, when people stroke cats, they aren't even trying to get the meat tender for sautéing. Yet they eat armored slugs that they call escargots! And they never heard of sloppy joes with fiber glass.

But who am I to complain? Under my new name ALF—for Alien Life Form—I'm now a bigger star than Alpha Centauri. My half hour on Monday nights on the NBC-TV network sometimes hits the Top Ten in the Nielsen ratings (just like ours, except recorded electronically instead of with marshmallows and thumbtacks) and is playing in about 50 countries. The show is the story of my life in a typical suburban household—working dad, nonworking mom, teenage daughter just out of braces, chirpy son who dresses up as a vegetable for the school play, and yours truly, the alien who has to hide in the laundry room when anyone comes to call. My Saturday-morning cartoon reminiscences about Melmac have become one of the three most popular TV shows for children. A movie about my journey from Melmac to earth is planned for later this year.

The biggest bucks (wer-nicks to you) come from marketing. Toymakers and schlockmeisters are peddling me via 250 items with total sales above \$200 million. There are storytelling dolls, skateboards, backpacks, comic books, coffee mugs, party hats, and chewing gum complete with cards for bouillabaisse—that's right, I'm introducing our old national pastime, fish and all. My favorite item is a T shirt showing me in X-ray glasses saying to passersby, "Hey, nice underwear." Haaa! I kill me! All in all, I am the busiest long-shnozzed, four-



**ALF at table: Where are the whisker omelets? The tabby-paw pies?**

toothed, 3-ft. 2-in. creature with burnt-siena fur anywhere on earth. Of course, there aren't many talking life forms here that look like me. I am continually being mistaken for an anteater, a dwarf orangutan or an armadillo, which on Melmac we encountered only in crossword puzzles.

Part of the reason for this mistaken identity is that my very existence has to remain a secret to keep the government scientists off my case. I have managed it through a brilliant scam: practically everyone thinks I'm a puppet! Sustaining this conspiracy takes a few collaborators. My main partner is a one-time comic magician named Paul Fusco. He actually claims to have invented me. Sure, he talks like me, laughs like me, jokes like me, even sort of looks like me. But I'm 230 years old and he's 35, barely old enough to

have a bar catzvah back home. Also important is Brandon Tartikoff, president of NBC Entertainment, who admits I am a personal favorite. We keep everyone off the set, supposedly to maintain the illusion that I'm real but actually to maintain the illusion that I'm an illusion. This reporter from TIME (here it's a magazine, not a dental drill) called Tartikoff to kvetch about that, so he agreed to describe the set: "There are all these holes for the uh, er, puppet. Holes in the couch, holes in the bed, holes in the floor. Trapdoors everywhere. It looks like a family of gophers live there." Together, we've concocted this great cover story. Supposedly Fusco came to pitch the idea of an alien moving in on a nice, normal family and driving them crazy with his rudeness and irresponsibility—whaddaya want, we had

to spice it up, it's entertainment—and the NBC guys were nodding off because the idea was too, like, subtle for them. So Fusco reached into a green plastic trash bag, pulled me out, made me sneeze, and I wiped my nose on Tartikoff's sleeve. Haaa! He loved it! Well, I guess you can tell, we actually didn't make that part up. Or the trash bag.

The indignities never stop. At the Tanners', I sleep in the garage or the laundry room. At NBC, I share my dressing room with a mop and bucket. The one saving grace to this abuse is that it helps fool even the cast into



**With the Tanners: Willie (Max Wright) and Kate (Anne Schedeen)**

*Working dad, nonworking mom and a 230-year-old pet in laundry room.*